

Elko
memo
Pg. I

ROLLING STONE

Dr. Hunter S. Thompson: National Correspondent

A-76

Memo #X01

Elko, Nevada

Organizing Conference: Feb 21-24, 1974

This is a first-draft, last-minute attempt to lash together a vague preamble, of sorts, with regard to the obvious question: What the fuck are we doing here in ^Elko, Nevada in a corner of the Stockmens' Hotel about 200 feet from the Burlington Northern RR tracks on a frozen weekend in late February? -- sharing the hotel with a state/sectional bridge-tournament -- at a time when the rest of the country seems to be teetering on the brink of an ugly, mean-spirited kind of long-term chaos that threatens, on an almost day-to-day basis, to mushroom beyond anything we can say think or plan out here in this atavistic sanctuary with nothing to recommend it except the world's largest dead Polar Bear and the biggest commercially-available hamburger west of the Ruhr. (Both of these are in the Commercial Hotel, ^{directly} across the RR tracks from our plush hq. in the Stockmens' Motor Hotel.)

Indeed....This is a valid question, and in the next

48 hours we will not have ^much else to do except try to answer it....
Or maybe just hang weird at the gambling tables & try to ignore the
whole thing. (Both the bars and casinos in Elko are open 24 hours a
day, in addition to several nearby whore-houses staffed by middle-
aged Indian ladies, so anybody who doesn't feel like getting into
politics has a variety of ^toptions (the train doesn't stop here, and
all departing flights are fully booked until Sunday) to while away
these rude and lonesome hours until we can all flee back to our
various sinecures in those bastions of liberalism where hired guns
and dilletantes ^are still honored..

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In any case, the original impulse that led to this
gathering bubbled up ^from a conversation I had in Aspen last summer
with Adam Walinsky, in which I expressed considerable reluctance
vis-a-vis my long-neglected idea about running for the U.S. Senate
from Colorado. I had, at that point, received several hundred
letters from people who wanted to work in "my campaign," and the
notion of backing off was beginning to fill me with guilt -- which
Adam nicely compounded by saying that, if I decided not to run, I'd
be one of the few people in the country who could honestly say that
he had ["]the Senator he deserved."

Which is not true, of course -- given the gang-bang
nature of the '74 Senate race in Colorado -- but after brooding on
that remark for many months I find it popping up in my head almost
every time I start thinking about politics. And especially about
the elections in 1976 -- which, until the unexpected demise of Spiro

Agnew -- I was inclined to view in very extreme and/or apocalyptic terms. Prior to Agnew's departure from the White House and (presumably) from the '76 presidential scene, I saw the 1976 elections as either a final affirmation of the Rape of the "American Dream" or perhaps the last ^s/_hance any of us would ever have to avert that rape -- if only temporarily -- or perhaps even drive a stake of some kind into the heart of that pieced-off vampire that Agnew would have ^{represented} been in '76, if "fate" had not intervened.

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But things have changed now. Agnew is gone, Nixon is on the ropes, and in terms of realpolitic the Republican party is down in the same ditch with the Democ^srats -- they are both looking back into their own loyalist ranks for names, ideas & possibilities: The GOP has been stripped all the way back to 1964, with Goldwater/Reagan vs. Rockefeller & maybe Percy on the outside.... but in fact ^N/_Nixon's mind-bending failure has effectiv^ely castrated the aggress^Pive/activist core of the GOP (all the Bright Young Men, as it were), and barring totally unforeseen circumstances between now & Nov '76, the GOP looks at a future of carping opposition until at least 1984.

Which would seem to be nice, for Democrats -- but I wouldn't know about that, because I share what seems to be a very active and potentially massive sentiment among^g the erstwhile "youth ^egeneration" (between^e age 25 & 40 now) to the effect that all career politicians should be put on The Rack -- in the name of either poetic or real justice, and probably for the Greater Good.

This sentiment, reflect^eed in virtually all age, income &

even demographic groups (sic/Caddell....) is broad & deep enough now -- and entirely justified, to my mind -- to have a massive effect ^{not only} on the '76 elections, which might in turn have a massive effect on the realities of life in America for the next several generations, but also on the life-expectancy of the whole concept of Participatory Democracy all over the globe.

As a minor & maybe even debatable forerunner of this, we can look back at what happened in South America (in the time-span of 5 or 6 years) when it suddenly became obvious in the mid-1960's that the Alliance for Progress was all bullshit . In half a decade, we saw a whole continent revert to various forms of ~~fanatic~~ fascism -- an almost instinctive reversion that was more inevitable than programmed, and which will take at least five decades to cure.

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Ah... that word again: "Cure."

Manifest Destiny.

The question raised by the ostensibly complex ~~idea~~ but essentially simple reality of what happened in South America in the late Sixties -- and also in Africa and most of Asia, for different reasons -- is only now beginning to seriously haunt the so-called "civilized" or at least "industrialized" nations in Europe and the northern Americas. President Marcos of the Phillipines put it very bluntly ab<sup>e</sup> out a <sup>e</sup> year ago in a quote I can't find now -- but I think it went something like this: "Your idea of "democracy" was right for your development, but it's not what we need for ours."

I've been meaning to go to the Phillipines to see what



kind of working alternative Marcos had in mind, but I haven't had the time....

Maybe<sup>f</sup> later. If we decide even tentatively here in Elko that <sup>a</sup>Marcos was right, I want to spend some time over <sup>e</sup>there very soon -- because, regardless of what happens in the Phillipines, the question Marcos raised has a nasty edge on it.

Was Thomas Jefferson a dingbat?

Ten days before he died<sup>d</sup>, on July 4, 1826, Jefferson wrote his own valedictory, which included the following nut:

"All eyes are opened, or opening, to the rights of man. The general spread of the light of scienc<sup>e</sup> has already laid open to every view the palpable truth, that the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few booted and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately, by the grace of God...."

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President Marcos would probably agree, ~~with him~~ but he would also probably argue that Jefferson's reality was so different from what was happening 100 years later in Russia or 200 years later in the Phillipines that his words, however admirable, are just as dated and even dangerous now as Patrick<sup>g</sup> Henry's wild-eyed demand for "liberty or death."

Ah... madness, madnesss.... where will it end?

I think I know, with regard<sup>ard</sup> to the way I live and intend to keep on living my own life -- but as I grow older and meaner and uglier it becomes more & more clear to me that only a lunatic or an egomaniacal asshole would try to impose the structure of his own



lifestyle on people who don't entirely understand it, unless he's ready to assume a personal responsibility for the consequences.

When the price of liberty included<sup>s</sup> the obligation to be drafted and have your legs blown off at the age of 22 in a place called Veet-Naam for some reason that neither Democr<sup>o</sup>atic nor Republican p<sup>e</sup>rsidents can finally claim to understand, then maybe death is not such an ugly ~~minim~~ alternative. Thomas Jefferson kept slaves, but there is nothing in history to indicate that he routinely sacrificed any of their lives & limbs for the sake of his fiscal security.

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Jesus, here we go again. Is there anyone in this star-crossed group with access to a Doctor of psychic-f<sup>o</sup>ocus drugs? If so, please meet me in the northwest corner of the Commercial Hotel casino at dawn on Saturday.

Meanwhile, I want to wind this thing out & down as quickly as possible.... and, since I asked most of the other people here to bring some kind of Focus-Document for the rest of us to cope with, I think this will have to be mine<sup>1</sup> if only because it's Wednesday morning now and I've already sunk six pages into what seems like a single idea, and it also strikes me as an idea (or question) that rarely if ever gets mentioned at political "conferences

This is the possibility that maybe we're all kidding ourselves about the intrinsic value of taking<sup>1</sup> politics seriously in 1970's America, and that maybe we (or the rest of you, anyway -- since I'm a dok<sup>o</sup>tor of journalism) are like a gang of hired guns on New Years Eve in 1899. Things changed ~~in~~<sup>g</sup> a bit after that, and



the <sup>o</sup>importance of being able to slap leather real fast at High Noon on Main Street seemed to fade ~~away~~ very precipitiously after 1900. A few amateurs<sup>u</sup> hung on in places like San Diego and Seattle until the War came, but by 1920 the Pros took over for real.

Which is getting <sup>o</sup>off the point, for now. What I want to do is raise the questions<sup>g</sup> immediately -- so we'll have to deal with it in the same context as all the others -- as <sup>o</sup>to whether Frank Mankiewicz~~was~~ was talking in the past, present or future when he said, in the intro to his book on Nixon, that ~~that~~ he learned from Robert Kennedy that "the practice of American politics....can be both joyous and honorable."

Whether or not Frank still agrees with that is not important, for now -- but in the context of why we're all out here in this god-forsaken place I think it's important ~~not~~ not to avoid the idea that reality in America might in fact be beyond the point where even the most joyous & honorable kind of politics can have any real effect on it. And I think we should also take a serious look at the health/prognosis for the whole idea of Participatory Democracy, in America or anywhere else.

That, to me, is an absolutely necessary cornerstone for anything else we might or might not put together -- because unless we're honestly convinced that the Practice<sup>ti</sup> of Politics is worth more than just a short-term high or the kind of short-term money that power-pimps pay for hired guns, my own feeling is that we'll be a lot better off avoiding all the traditional liberal bullshit and just saying it straight out: That<sup>a</sup> we're all just a bunch of fine-tuned



Politics Junkies and we're ready to turn Main Street into a graveyard for anybody who'll pay the price & even pretend to say the Right Things.

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But we don't want to get carried away with this Olde West gig -- except to recognize a certain connection between politics/campaign Hit Men in 1974 and hired guns all over the West in 1874. It's just as hard to know for sure what Matt Dillon thought he was really doing <sup>then</sup> as it is, today, to know what the fuck Ben Wattenberg might <sup>describe</sup> claim as the "far, far better thing" he really has in mind....

One of the primary ideas of this conference, in my own <sup>head</sup> ~~mind~~, is to keep that kind of brutal option open -- if that's what we seem to agree on. Maybe tilting with windmills really is the best & most honorable way to go, these days. I get a definite kick out of it, myself --but I have a feeling that my time is getting ~~a bit~~ short, and I'm <sup>becoming</sup> ~~getting~~ unnaturally curious about how much <sup>h</sup> reality we're really dealing with.

This is what the rest of you are going to have to come up with. My only role in this trip, as I see it right now, is to eventually write the introduction to some kind of book-form statement that the rest of you (& <sup>b</sup> ~~probably~~ a few others) will eventually crank out. We are dealing with a genuinely ominous power-vacuum right now, in terms of political reality. Both major parties seem to be curling back into an ill-disguised fetal crouch -- and the stuporous horror of a Jackson-Ford race in '76 is as easily



conceivable as the barely-avoided reality of another Nixon-Humphrey contest was in 1972.

There is no way to get away from names and personalities in any serious talk about the '76 election -- but if that's all we can talk about, I think we should write this whole project off, as of Sunday, as a strange bummer of sorts that never got un-tracked. Shit, we'd be better off at the crap tables, or watching the Keno balls.

On the other hand, I don't think we're ~~here~~ here to write some kind of an all-purpose Platform for a (presumably) Democratic<sup>t</sup> candidate in '76. Massive evidence suggests that there are plenty of people around who are already into that.

What we might do, I think, is at least define some of the critical and unavoidable questions that any presidential candidate will have to deal with, in order to be taken seriously in '76. We have a long list of these goddamn things to ~~deal~~<sup>hassle</sup> with, in the very short space of two days<sup>s</sup> and the best we can do for right now is: 1) Decide if the patient is worth saving.... 2) What's basically wrong with the patient.... 3) and if the saving is worth the effort, how to define & begin dealing with the basics.

At the same time, we want to keep in mind that a really fearful (or "<sup>R</sup>feasome") chunk of the voting population is in a very vengeful & potentially-dangerous mood with regard to national or even local politics. If <sup>G</sup>George Metesky decided to run for the Senate in NY against Javits this year, I suspect he would do pretty well....

And, for the same reason(s), I'm absolutely certain



I could fatally cripple any Democratic candidate for the U.S. Senate in Colorado by merely entering the race as a serious Independent.... but that would only guarantee Dominick's re-election, I <sup>1</sup>think, and besides that I have a great fear of having to move back to Washington. <sup>(X)</sup>

Which is neither <sup>e</sup>here nor there. My only real concern is to put something together that will force a gen<sup>u</sup>ine alteration of consciousness in the realm of national politics, and also in the heads of national ~~politicians~~ <sup>S</sup>politicians. Given the weird temper of all the people I've talked to in the past year, this is the only course that could possibly alter the drift of at least a third of the electo<sup>r</sup>ate away from politics entirely..... and without that third, the White House in '76 is going to become the same kind of mine-field that Gracie Mansion became about 10 years ago, and for many of the same <sup>S</sup>reasons.

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Okay for now. I have to get this bastard xeroxed and then catch the bush-plane <sup>n</sup>for Elko <sup>g</sup>in two hours. The agenda will have to wait -- not only in terms of time, but also for people who will hopefully have a much better sense of priorities than I do.

If not, you bastards are going to wish you never heard the word "Elko."

Sincerely,

Hunter S. Thompson

<sup>(X)</sup> - I have formally "withdrawn" from the race.